

CAGE MEETING WITH OCC ON MONDAY 12TH SEPTEMBER 2011

Present: Alec Hayton (WTC/CAGE)
Mark Gray (CPC/CAGE)
Suzi Coyne (CAGE's Mineral Consultant)
Henry Thornton (CAGE)
Peter Day (OCC)
Lois Partridge (OCC)

Copy to: Patrick Green
South Oxfordshire District Council
Wallingford Town Council
Cholsey Parish Council
Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Parish Council
North Moreton Parish Council

1. Meeting to discuss the sites put forward for sand and gravel working in South Oxfordshire in OCC's Minerals Planning Strategy Consultation Draft, not the merits of the argument justifying the county quantities or requirements elsewhere in the county.
2. ARCHAEOLOGY – SC suggested that CAGE's investigations indicated that SG33 potentially had significant archaeology and should require a proper investigation before nomination, something already identified by SODC. OCC said that they were advised by the County Archaeologist and would make further enquiries.
3. SC pointed out that the quantities identified for the land at Shillingford (SG13 – 5.3 million tonnes) already took account of the fact that not all of the site could be quarried due to archaeology - although archeology had still been presented by OCC as a reason not to pursue this site. OCC to check this with the promoter Hanson.
4. SC said that a contact, who had previously worked for Hanson, thought that the quality of material at SG33 was poor and that was the reason why they had not pursued the site after all their initial borehole investigations. SC to check with Hanson and ask for borehole data.
5. AVAILABLE RESOURCES – SC explained her analysis of the quantities available from SG33 taking account the constraints within and around the site, reducing OCC's estimated tonnage from 4 million to 3.5 million. Constraints included, watercourses and paths, housing, a listed building, the heritage railway and town sewer and proposed cycle path within the site.
6. SC questioned why the Radley site SG41 had been discounted on grounds of not being deliverable within ten years. She said that the same rationale would probably apply to SG33 as Smiths had reserves in the Windrush Valley which would keep them going for 10/20 years and would be unlikely to move their plant over before then. In any event the Sutton Courtenay site was good until 2020.
7. AONB – CAGE pointed out that SG33 was bordering directly on an AONB, unlike any other site and that it was clearly visible from Cholsey Hill within the AONB and from across the river where new development was planned.

8. LISTED BUILDING – SC pointed out that SG33 was the only site being considered which actually included a listed building.
9. ECOLOGY - Wallingford and Cholsey are separated by just under a mile of arable and grazing farmland, hedges and trees. It was a largely peaceful and undisturbed area, supporting an amazing variety of bird species and wildlife which will be lost if these plans go ahead. CAGE would be submitting a report on the wildlife, which has even included sightings of otters.
10. TOURISM, ECONOMIC AND AMENITY VALUE – SODC and Wallingford TC had their own core strategy to promote the town as a tourist attraction, based on its historic Saxon heritage and rural riverside setting. This would be severely jeopardized by a quarry on its southern edge.
11. CAGE said that a quarry on this site will severely damage the countryside and directly affect the lives of the 10,000 people who live in these two communities, and yet this did not appear to be a criteria in their assessment – why not? There was even a hospital and housing directly upwind of the site.
12. CHOLSEY AND WALLINGFORD RAILWAY – This heritage and tourist railway, which was set up thirty years ago and relies on tourism for almost all its funds, runs for most of its length alongside the proposed gravel pit, on land owned by the Wallingford Town Council. The Railway had advised CAGE that they feared the proposed gravel pit would threaten their ability to continue operating both by destroying its reputation as an attraction and by causing instability to the railway.
13. AGATHA CHRISTIE TRAIL – CAGE will send OCC the guide to the trail sponsored by SODC and others that shows the route alongside the proposed quarry from her house in Winterbrook to her grave in Cholsey Church. They emphasised the importance of Agatha Christie’s links to the town, which attracted people from all over the world.
14. ROAD AND CYCLE PATH BETWEEN WALLINGFORD AND CHOLSEY – CAGE raised the importance of the Wallingford Road for commuters travelling daily to Oxford, Reading and London from Cholsey station, and others going the other way to school, work or shopping trips in Wallingford. OCC had an eco plan for a cycle path just inside the proposed site to encourage commuters and school children to cycle, which would inevitably be jeopardized by these plans. CAGE pointed out that a third of the funding for the cycle path was already in place and the balance should be available during the next 5-10 years from S106 payments from new housing developments in the area.
15. FARMLAND – CAGE asked for the site to be correctly identified as Grade 2 agricultural land, not 2,3 or even 4.
16. MILES TO MARKET - The question as to where the sand and gravel was destined was discussed and OCC agreed with CAGE that the market would decide, some would go west to Didcot, Wantage and Grove and some north towards Oxford. By that criteria CAGE suggested that the sites to the north of Wallingford were therefore closer to their market than SG33.
17. CAGE suggested that SG17 was particularly well placed with access onto the A415 and then the A4074, but with inadequate bridge crossings directly into Didcot. As this site was next to the existing gravel operations in Sutton Courtenay, CAGE asked why a conveyor system could not be rigged up across the river. OCC said that in principle it could as had happened at Bray, but the company that has nominated SG17 is not the same as the operator at Sutton

Courtenay. CAGE suggested that OCC could surely exercise some influence in such an important decision.

18. RESTORATION – CAGE asked what the proposal was for restoring the land would be. There were fears that it would not be agricultural as at present but some sort of sunken depressions, which would be wet in winter and dry in summer. It had been assumed that the MOD/RAF would object to water areas being formed although a response from them was still awaited. OCC thought that the MOD might no longer be taking such a firm line on Benson, unlike Brize Norton.
19. CAGE asked why a key criteria for selecting a site was not an agreed and credible restoration outcome, the one factor, which would affect the site in perpetuity.
20. CORE STRATEGY - OCC said that their Core Strategy was not intended as a detailed analysis of sites; it identifies broad areas for future working, within which sites would subsequently be identified. But OCC has used the information on nominated sites that has been provided by mineral companies and landowners to assess the potential deliverability of the areas and check that the proposed strategy is feasible.
21. CAGE said that OCC's draft proposals went much further than that as they actually identified specific sites and relied on the promoters' analysis of them. OCC confirmed that only one area in SODC was being put forward in their Core Strategy and that covered sites SG33/57/60, the Wallingford/Cholsey sites.
22. OCC said that the Core Strategy was not based on specific sites and a fuller analysis will be required to check the detail when the sites are chosen. CAGE made the point that they have already taken forward only one new site area, SG33/57/60, into the current consultation, without having done the detailed analysis. It will put them in a difficult position to reject the only site being put forward at the end of this consultation, even if the evidence weighed in favour of such a decision.
23. CAGE asked why the choice of sites being taken into account was limited to those put forward by promoters and landowners, rather than by a proper appraisal of the most suitable sites in the county. OCC said that this because there had to be reasonable certainty that the strategy would be deliverable within the plan period.
24. CAGE questioned why it was not possible to sign up a properly selected site in such a long timeframe, as landowners would probably cooperate. *(SC had previously mentioned that when OCC was having problems finding a source for soft sand and had done an independent appraisal and approached landowners direct, they had been warmly welcomed).*
25. CONSULTATION MEETING - CAGE were invited by OCC to send a representative to a Draft Minerals Strategy discussion group (20 people) at Oxford Town Hall on Thursday 29th September, 10am to 12.45pm. CAGE said that the parish and town councils were concerned that they had not been properly consulted in 2010. This was noted.